Abstract

Set within the broad debate on migration, development and remittances, this paper makes a comparative analysis of two migration-remittance corridors in contrasting regions of the world: Ecuador-USA and Albania-Greece. Operating mainly at the micro-level and based on two questionnaire surveys of remittance receiving households supported by in-depth interviews, we unpack the family dynamics of remittance transfers through an anal

privileged treatment as immigrants in Greece), and ethnic Roma and Evgjit ('gypsies'), who are dark-skinned, poor and marginalised. The villages lie within the district and prefecture of Korçë. The city of Korçë (population 85,000) is the most important regional pole for south-east Albania. With its administrative functions, food and textile industries, university, mosques and large Orthodox Cathedral, Korçë is relatively prosperous by Albanian standards.

The villages lie at an altitude of 800 metres on an elevated plain which is favourable for farming, with fertile soils. Summers are hot and dry, winters usually cold and wet, with some snow. A mixed form of agriculture is practised, with livestock (pigs, cattle, sheep, poultry), cereals, vegetables and fruits; apple orchards are a local speciality. Most farming is semi-subsistence, however, due to a number of reasons: the dismantling of the communist-era cooperatives and the fragmentation of land into small holdings, lack of marketing and transport systems, and the depletion of the labour force by emigration.

Given its position relatively close to the Greek border, the vast majority of international migration is to Greece. There is no breakdown at the local level of different emigration destinations, but a realistic estimate is that at least 80 per cent of Pojan's emigration is to this country. Smaller numbers go to Italy, Macedonia, the US and Canada, the last two destinations partly through links established by pre-communist emigration from this area. The

working in Greece. The older son is married with his wife and young child living with them in Thessaloniki, the younger emigrant son is single. The daughter is married and also has her nuclear family, including her husband, abroad. The middle-aged couple's main dyad is with their younger, unmarried son. The older son has his co-resident family as his main financial and moral responsibility, so he sends only small amounts, maybe for special occasions or in emergencies, to his parents. The daughter, according to Albanian patriarchal custom, 'belongs' to the family of her husband and so is not 'allowed' to send remittances to her parents, although she may, openly or secretly, send small token 'gifts' to them (see Smith 2009). We explore some of these arrangements in more detail presently.

Much the same distinction as that between main and secondary dyads applies to the migration and remittance corridors within which the remittance dyads are strung out. The Albania-Greece corridor is a symmetrical main corridor in that Greece is the main migrant destination for Albanians, and Albanians are the main migrant group in Greece: the figures were given earlier.

Table 5 Main remittance dyads: most common patterns, Xarbán

Sender (New York)		Receiver (Xarbán)
Married male migrant alone abroad	→	Wife (and children)
Married couple abroad	→	Maternal female relatives (caring for migrants' children)
Married couple abroad	→	Children (if old enough)
Single Male	→	

out), the multi-generation family, almost a clan, is more important, with the oldest male as the patriarch over the extended household. When emigrants originate from the north – as in a previous study of remittances sent by Albanian migrants in London to their families back home (King et al. 2006) – these 'traditional' gendered and patriarchally controlled patterns are found to be replicated more or less throughout the migration and remittance cycle. Our data from southern Albania show some departures from this patriarchal framework, as we shall see.

Remittance dyads also expose, to varying extents, the fallacy of the household or family as a harmonious unit with shared collective interests: the assumption implicit in much writing about remittances, including the pioneering studies of the New Economics of Labour Migration approach (Lucas and Stark 1985; Stark and Lucas 1988; Taylor 1999). Rather, as other studies have shown (e.g. Cligget 2005; de Haas and Fokkema 2010), dyadic relations are not problem-free. Some further examples of these tensions will become apparent as we look now at each dyad in turn. We start with Xarbán as the patterns here are somewhat more straightforward.

Xarbán and New York

For both Xarbán and Pojan, emigration

socially.

For married migrants, the majority of whom have their spouses in Xarbán, remittances are to the wives, irrespective of whether there are children yet in the marriage. However, all respondents (remittance senders and receivers alike) agree that the obligation to send remittances becomes stronger once children are born, and especially if there is at least one son.

> **Once I had kids my life improved. Before he sent $20 a month to me. He didn't care whether I had any shoes on my feet or not. Now he sends $400 a month. Because of the children, he must send [money to support them] (BC, 30, wife of migrant with two daughters and one son).**

'common good' or 'hometown' project. Third, we focus explicitly on the use-destinations of mainly financial remittances: 'drip-feeding' or 'survival' remittances, debt repayment, emergency money, savings, gifts and collective remittances. Finally, for social remittances, we focus on the gender-relations dimensions, since this is one of our key analytical dimensions in the paper. Rather than deal with each community in turn, here we mix and compare evidence from Xarbán and Pojan under each remittance heading.

Emic remittances: 'drip-feeding'

Our use of the term 'emic' remittances privileges what the receivers themselves identify as remittances. In general Xarbán villagers understand remittances (remesas) as the small amounts of money sent to them periodically by their close relatives abroad, and which are used to pay for the food, utilities and everyday expenses in running a household. They include children's education costs and recurrent small medical expenses in their definition, but not unexpected and high medical bills. These 'survival' or 'drip-feeding' remittances, sent regularly every month or so, are often referred to by food analogies – 'so that we can eat' or 'no mas para la comidita' (only for food).

In Albania too there is a distinction to be drawn between the technical interpretation of remittances (by economists, development planners etc.) and the general view of the migrants and their relatives who tend to see remittances as 'wages' (if sent to family members of working age) or 'pensions' (if sent to support elderly relatives). Again the implication is that this is for day-to-day support rather than investment in larger projects such as a business or a house. In the words of Elona (20) who receives money from her husband in Greece:

> I try to use the money wisely: for food, to buy clothes for the children, to pay for their school items because they need things like notebooks, pens etc.

The following extract from a Pojan dual interview with Marika (68) and her daughter Kristina (42) is about the remittances sent by Marika's son who lives with his wife and family in Greece. The son works in a furniture factory and his wife cleans houses; both earn around €40 per day. The dialogue draws the difference between 'survival' remittances sent to the two of them on a regular basis for their own use, and larger amounts of money brought back by the son and used to fund the new house being built in the village:

> Marika: He sends us money via a relative of his wife, who travels frequently by car...he never pays them, because they are relatives... of course they are trusted people.
>
> Kristina: He sends us between €50 and €100 every two or three months.
>
> Marika: He doesn't leave us without: 'so that you may not be in need', he says. We don't need more than that, we try to get by on that [plus Marika's monthly state pension, €45]. At the end of the month, or after two or three months, they come here, see our situation and leave us what we need, just to feed ourselves. What else do we need?

paper.

Using the trope of gender also allows us to engage in an interesting reflexive debate about the linearity vs. circularity of the 'practice' of social remittances, and to play this off against another reciprocal relationship, that between social remittances and gender. Let us explain. In Levitt's original formulation, social remittances were seen as 'north-to-south' transfers of 'behaviours, identities and social capital' (1998: 927) that assumed a one-way linearity, seen most clearly in the 'hometown' literature (cf. Alarcon 2000; Goldring 2004). Although the innate breadth and malleability of the term has allowed it to evolve into a number of materialisations, ranging from culture (e.g. music, dress codes etc.), to technological transfers (e.g. use of agricultural machinery or familiarity with computers through laptops sent as gifts), to the currently fashionable notion of 'mobilising the diaspora' for developmental purposes, the essential linearity of all these hypothesised transfer processes is clear. In order to avoid reductionist and unrealistic notions of change and development, social remittances must not be conceptualised as one-way traffic. Instead, following Levitt and Lamba-Nieves (2011), we conceive social remittances as ideational resources being continually crafted in their (circular) motion. People's values and experiences before migration strongly influence what

migration and remittance dynamics in two

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